

Marne, Battles of the

{mahrn}

The Battles of the Marne, two important WORLD WAR I battles, derived their name from the Marne River, a small tributary of the Seine, in France.

First Battle of the Marne (Sept. 5-10, 1914).

In the opening days of the war the Germans, sweeping through Belgium and southward into France, hoped to encircle Paris and score a quick victory. The First Battle of the Marne, although tactically inconclusive, was strategically a great Allied victory—and one of the most decisive in history—thwarting the German plan for an early end to the war.

After major victories in the Battles of the Frontiers (August 14-25), four right-flank German armies thrust deep into northeastern France, driving before them the French Third, Fourth, and Fifth armies and (on the Allied left) the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The French commander in chief, Gen. Joseph JOFFRE, assembled a newly created Sixth Army in Paris and inserted another new army—the Ninth—between the Fourth and the Fifth. Joffre's plan was that as the German army on the extreme right flank—the First, commanded by Gen. Alexander von Kluck—advanced east of Paris in pursuit of the retreating British and French, it would be struck on its right flank by the Sixth Army on September 6, and the retreating armies, bolstered by the Ninth, would turn in counterattack.

Joffre's plan was almost ruined on September 5 when right-flank units of Kluck's army detected the French Sixth Army advance from Paris and counterattacked. The aggressive Kluck then launched an attack toward Paris in the Battle of the Ourcq. By turning west, however, Kluck created a gap to his left between his army and the Second, under Gen. Karl von Bulow. Energetic counterattacks by Gen. Louis Franchet d'Esperey's French Fifth Army in the Battle of the Petit Morin drove back von Bulow's right flank, further widening the gap. Into this gap slowly moved the BEF, commanded by Field Marshal Sir John FRENCH. Meanwhile, further to the Allied right, inconclusive struggles matched Gen. Ferdinand FOCH's Ninth French Army against the left of the German Second and the right of the Third in the Battle of the St. Gond Marshes. Still further on the Allied right, in the Battle of Vitry le Francois, the French Fourth Army under Gen. Fernand de Langle de Cary battled to a standstill against the German Fourth under Duke Albert of Wurttemberg.

Unable to maintain adequate communications with his fast-moving right-flank armies, the German commander in chief, Gen. Helmuth Johannes Ludwig von MOLTKE, sent a trusted staff officer, Lt. Col. Richard Hentsch, to assess the situation, and to issue orders if necessary. When on September 9 Hentsch discovered that von Bulow's Second Army had been pushed back by the French Fifth, and he realized that the British were moving into the gap between the German First and Second Armies, Hentsch ordered both armies to retreat to the Aisne River. Kluck retreated to prevent his army from being encircled. Allied losses in the first Battle of the Marne were about 250,000; German casualties amounted to nearly 300,000.

Second Battle of the Marne (July 15-17, 1918).

The Second Battle of the Marne stopped the fifth and last of Gen. Erich LUDENDORFF's great 1918 German offensives. Although the Germans were quickly stopped along most of the Champagne-Marne front, the Seventh Army broke through Allied lines west of Reims and drove about 16 km (10 mi) to the Marne River, which was then crossed by 14 German divisions. The Allied lines soon stiffened, however, largely because of the stubborn defense of the American 3d Division and the arrival of other American units.

Within three days of the start of the offensive the Germans were halted, and on July 18 the Allies began a counteroffensive that did not stop until the Armistice on November 11.

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Verdun, Battle of

The WORLD WAR I Battle of Verdun (Feb. 21-Nov. 26, 1916), an unsuccessful German effort to take the offensive in the west, was one of the longest and bloodiest encounters of the war. Total casualties have been estimated at about 542,000 French and about 434,000 Germans.

The German assault, directed by Gen. Erich von FALKENHAYN, began with a furious bombardment followed by an attack on the region surrounding Verdun, which lay in the middle of an Allied salient jutting into the German zone in northeastern France. Initially successful, the Germans captured Fort Douamont (February 25).

Gen. Joseph JOFFRE, the French commander in chief, was determined to halt further retreat for reasons of morale as well as strategy. On February 25 he assigned Gen. Henri Philippe PETAIN to head the Verdun defense. Petain, fighting under the famous motto *Ils ne passeront pas!* ("They shall not pass!"), reorganized his command and brought up reinforcements while the weary German troops paused.

On March 6 the Germans attacked the western face of the salient; they were halted after initial advances, but the loss of life on both sides was enormous. A third offensive, from both east and west, began on April 9, but again the Germans were stopped.

German assaults continued into early July, and Petain, who had been promoted and replaced as local commander by Gen. Robert NIVELLE, recommended withdrawal. During the summer, however, the Anglo-French Somme offensive (see SOMME, BATTLES OF THE) and the Russian Brusilov offensive drew off German manpower, and in the late summer the Germans adopted a defensive posture on the western front.

The French soon took the offensive. Under Gen. Charles Mangin they recaptured Fort Douamont (October 24) and Fort Vaux (November 2). By the time the fighting at Verdun had ended in mid-December, the French had advanced almost to their February lines.

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Clemenceau, Georges

{kle-mahn-soh'}

The French statesman Georges Clemenceau, popularly known as "the Tiger," contributed to the Allied victory in World War I and helped formulate the Treaty of Versailles. Clemenceau was born on Sept. 28, 1841, and received a medical education. A lifelong republican, he opposed the regime of Napoleon III and, as a result, spent several years in the United States.

In 1870, after the overthrow of Napoleon during the Franco-Prussian War, Clemenceau became mayor of Montmartre. He tried to prevent civil war when the radical COMMUNE OF PARIS revolted in 1871 but was unsuccessful in preventing the death of two generals at the mob's hands. He was later tried and cleared of the charges that resulted.

As a journalist and, from 1876, a Radical deputy, Clemenceau uncompromisingly opposed clericalism, and he helped overthrow many of France's moderate and conservative ministries. In 1892, however, he was caught in the web of the scandal involving bribes to the press and the deputies by the company constructing the Panama Canal. Clemenceau lost his seat in the chamber in 1893, but was returned to politics by the DREYFUS AFFAIR. In 1898 he published Emile ZOLA's open letter "J'accuse" in his newspaper L'Aurore. His fervent support of Dreyfus not only helped clear the latter's name but restored his own reputation.

Elected to the Senate in 1902, Clemenceau served as premier from 1906 to 1909. Because he feared the power of Germany, he strengthened cooperation with Britain and approved the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 that, in effect, created the TRIPLE ENTENTE of France, Russia, and Britain. Labor unrest flared during Clemenceau's term, culminating in strikes in 1908-09. His use of troops to break one strike cost him the support of the Radicals, and he lost office.

In November 1917, President Raymond POINCARÉ again called Clemenceau to the premiership, knowing that only Clemenceau could maintain French national unity. In a short time the new premier raised national morale, sustaining it through the onslaught of a fresh German offensive of March 1918. The next month he obtained unification of the Allied command under Gen. Ferdinand FOCH, who organized the Allied offensive that ended the war.

Clemenceau led the French delegation at the PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE. There he advocated the establishment of French-occupied buffer states on the Rhine River and the creation of strong states on Germany's eastern border. He also demanded REPARATIONS from the Germans for French war damages. Although Clemenceau was much harsher toward the Germans than either President Woodrow WILSON or Prime Minister David LLOYD GEORGE, many in France criticized him as being too lenient. Old political grievances brought the Tiger down. Clemenceau had denounced some members of the Left as defeatists in 1917; in 1920 they defeated him in the presidential election. He retired from politics and died on Nov. 24, 1929.

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